

PRESS RELEASE

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FOUR CENTURIES OF ITALIAN PRINTS
May 1 - July 22, 1990

Some of the Cleveland Museum's finest and rarest Italian prints will be on view when **Four Centuries of Italian Prints** opens May 1 at The Cleveland Museum of Art. Jane Glaubinger, associate curator and acting administrator in the Department of Prints and Drawings, chose about 80 of the Museum's engravings, etchings, and woodcuts to show the development of the history of printmaking in Italy from the 15th through the 18th centuries.

By around 1460, a few decades after its invention in Germany, engraving was flourishing in Italy. While northern engravings were perfectly executed, Italian engravings reflected the technical uncertainty of less experienced printers. At first, engravings were the work of craftsmen and intended as devotional images for church festivals and religious occasions. Eventually, painters of the first rank, such as Andrea Mantegna, took up printmaking to publish their own works, and prints gained the status of a more important art form.

The finest impressions of 15th-century Italian engravings were printed in subtle gray ink and had a silvery appearance, in contrast to the rich black ink of German engravings. Two main styles developed in Florence: the "fine" manner and the "broad" manner. The fine manner, as exemplified by the anonymous engraving St. Jerome in Penitence, created a soft, tonal effect with lightly engraved lines and patches of delicate cross-hatching. The broad manner, as seen in the Museum's very rare engraving Assumption of the Virgin by Francesco Rosselli, features longer, thicker lines in a single diagonal direction. The exhibition includes the only known impression of the first state of Antonio Pollaiuolo's Battle of the Nudes

and the finest extant impression of Mantegna's Risen Christ Between St. Andrew and St. Longinus.

In the 16th century, Italian prints began to show the influences of Germany: black ink and thicker lines were used, prints were no longer delicate and silvery, and they were better printed. Marcantonio Raimondi, for example, influenced by the German Albrecht Dürer's prints and by ancient sculpture, developed a disciplined technique to achieve painterly effects. Reinterpreting the paintings of Raphael, Raimondi spread High Renaissance classicism through Italy and Northern Europe. Artists were not merely copyists; in restating the basic composition of drawings or paintings, they translated the design from one medium into another and used their own techniques to create individual works. Woodcuts also became important in 16th-century Italy, demonstrated by Titian's ambitious The Submersion of Pharaoh's Army in the Red Sea, which is printed from 12 blocks on 12 sheets of paper. Chiaroscuro woodcuts, which often used two or three shades of the same color, as in Andrea Andreani's Rape of the Sabines, became popular, too.

Artists of the 17th century found etching attractive because of the facility and freedom that it offered. For painters, etching was as easy as drawing with pen on paper and yielded prints that had spontaneous charm. The Entombment, by Francesco Parmigianino, has this vibrant quality.

Venice in the 18th century enjoyed a new creative freedom in the arts, literature, music, and theater. With a disregard for historical accuracy, artists depicted imaginary places and altered real ones. "Capricci," by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo and Giovanni Battista Piranesi, were fantastic inventions of unconventional subject and composition. Canaletto's etched views of Venice were sketchy and spontaneous, using short, varying lines in many directions to give the effect of shimmering light and vibrating atmosphere.

The exhibition will be in the Prints and Drawings gallery through July 22.